

# JOHN KNOX AND THE BIBLE

BY THE REV. PROFESSOR G. D. HENDERSON, D.D., D.LITT.

JOHN KNOX was a man of wide experience, travelled and tried, who, though not of stature comparable with that of Luther or Calvin, yet by pioneering qualities, vivid personality, vehement utterance, and thorough policy, did much to bring about and establish the Scottish Reformation. While he showed little originality he was not without independence; and although the theological, administrative and liturgical documents for which he was mainly responsible were ultimately superseded or remained ineffective, he did set the direction for Scotland, and as far as the Bible is concerned confirmed our Church for centuries in the attitude characteristic of Calvin. He has left no systematic exposition of his views on Scripture, but they are plain from his writings in general. A survey of these leads one to suggest that perhaps too much attention has been paid to revolutionary aspects of his Reformation and too little to the continuity of the Church of Scotland with the Church of the early centuries. Knox himself thought of the pre-Reformation Church into which he had been baptised as controlled by Anti-Christ, and he regarded its worship as idolatry and one mass as more terrible than an invading army;<sup>1</sup> but his attitude, for example, to the Bible is in the main an attitude that had descended to him from the Early Church. It is true, as Whitehead has pointed out, that "even when the same assertion is made to-day as was made a thousand or fifteen hundred years ago, it is made subject to limitations or expansions of meaning, which were not contemplated at the earlier epoch."<sup>2</sup> At the same time revolutionaries have generally imagined themselves much more independent of the past than they really were, and the Reformers were no exception to this. In the case of Knox as in other cases there was a very great change of emphasis. There is often said to have been a substitution of the authority of the Bible for the authority of the Church, and both Calvin and Knox believed that the Church was derived from and not prior to the Word, the means by which the Word was to become known. Said Calvin: "Nothing can be more absurd than the fiction that the power of judging Scripture is in the Church and that on her nod its certainty depends";<sup>3</sup> and the *Scots Confession* is equally decided: "As we beleieve and confesse the Scriptures

<sup>1</sup> *Works of John Knox* (Laing, 1846- ), III, 186; VI, 30; II, 276.

<sup>2</sup> *Science and the Modern World* (1945 reprint), 227.

<sup>3</sup> *Institutio*, I, vii, 2.

of God sufficient to instruct and make the man of God perfite, so do we affirme and avow the authoritie of the same to be of God, and nether to depend on men nor angelis. We affirme, therefore, that sic as allege the Scripture to have na uther authoritie bot that quhilk it hes received from the Kirk, to be blasphemous against God, and injurious to the trew Kirk, quhilk alwaies heares and obeyis the voice of her awin Spouse and Pastor, bot takis not upon her to be maistres over the samin."<sup>1</sup>

There was likewise a very great change of emphasis with regard to Tradition. "Innumerable traditions," writes Calvin, "have arisen to be as many deadly snares to miserable souls";<sup>2</sup> and Knox makes strong protest against religion being measured "by custome, consuetude, will, consent, and determinations of men."<sup>3</sup> As to the Fathers, Knox remarks that men are not to be received as God and adds: "Therefore with Augustine I consent that whatsoever the Doctors propone and plainly confirme the same by the evident testimonie of the Scriptures, I am hartlie content to receive the same; but els that it be laughful to me with Jerome to say, Whatsoever is affirmed without the authoritie of God's Scriptures with the same facilitie it may be rejected as it is affirmed."<sup>4</sup>

## I

It is obvious that the Reformation in Scotland as elsewhere brought a great change in giving the Bible to the people. They had been free to read it for themselves in the early days of the Church's history; but the Middle Ages thought it unsafe and unwise to put the book directly into lay hands, and the Council of Trent confirmed this attitude.<sup>5</sup> Little effort had latterly been made to have even priests well instructed in the Scriptures in Scotland. Lyndsay's poems witness to extreme ignorance in this direction among the clergy, and thoughtful priests like Richardinus and Archibald Hay in the pre-Reformation Church admitted that this was a serious defect.<sup>6</sup> Protestantism also revived the devotional use of the Bible. After about 700 A.D. says one authority, "the Bible has ceased to be a living book, warm and vital, instinct with human interests and has become a mere congeries of texts which are useful to prove the current theology."<sup>7</sup> Knox's reading on the other hand was not merely

<sup>1</sup> *Art. XIX* (G. D. Henderson's edit., 1937).

<sup>2</sup> *Inst.*, IV, x, 1.      <sup>3</sup> *Works*, IV, 80.      <sup>4</sup> VI, 194.

<sup>5</sup> F. J. Paul, *Romanism and Evangelical Christianity* (1940), 40-44; G. Salmon, *Infallibility of the Church* (1914), 118 f.

<sup>6</sup> W. Murison, *Sir David Lyndsay* (1938), 60, 95, 178, 192, 195.

<sup>7</sup> G. H. Gilbert, *Interpretation of the Bible* (1908), 143. See also C. H. Dodd, *The Authority of Scripture* (1928), 5ff.

intellectual or textual, but intelligently devout, and one of the most eloquent passages in his writings shows this plainly : " Ye, knowynge the Worde of God not onely to be that whereby were created heaven and earth, but also to be the power of God to salvation to al that beleve, the bryght lantarne to the fete of these that by nature walke in darkenesse, the lyfe to those that by synne are dead, a comforte of such as be in tribulation, the tower of defence to suche as be moste feble, the wysedome and great felicitie of such as delyteth in the same, and to be shorte ye knowe Goddes worde to be of suche efficacie and strength that therby is synne purged, death vanquyshed, tyrauntes suppressed, and finally the Devel the author of all myserie, overthrowen and confounded."<sup>1</sup> There can be no doubt that the Reformation encouraged the general reading of the Bible. In the year 1565 Knox refers to all his " studye and travayle within the Scriptures of God these twentye yeares."<sup>2</sup> An Act of the Scottish Parliament in March 1543 had permitted the reading of the Bible in the vernacular. That was the period of which Knox wrote : " Then mycht have bene sein the Byble lying almaist upoun everie gentilmanis table. The New Testament was borne about in many manis handes " ; and he adds : " Thairby did the knowledge of God wonderouslie increase, and God geve his Holy Spreit to sempill men in great aboundance."<sup>3</sup> No edition of the complete Bible was printed in Scotland till 1579 ; but the Dedication to the edition states that " almaist in every private house the buike of God's law is red and understand in our vulgarie language."<sup>4</sup> When Knox went back to the Continent in 1556 he left a " wholesome counsell " which lays great stress upon " the exercise of God's moste sacred and holy woorde, without which neither shal knowledge encrease, godlines appeare, nor fervencye contynewe amongst you." The Word of God he declares " the beginning of lyfe spirituall," " the foundation of faith," " the onely organe and instrument " of salvation. Just as necessary as daily bread for the body " so necessary is also to the lyfe everlastinge and to the illumination and light of the soule, the perpetuall meditation, exercyse and use of Goddes holye Worde." He wants the Bible read in the family and practised in daily life. He wants schools so that people will be able to read the Bible for themselves. He wants the faithful to meet together for the careful study of the Word. And he declares : " I wyll more gladly spende xv houres in communicatyng my judgements with yow, in explainyng as God pleases to open to me any place of Scripture then halfe an houre in any matter besyd."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, III, 301.      <sup>2</sup> VI, 229.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, I, 100f ; *Acts of Parl. of Scot.*, II, 415 ; *Hamilton Papers*, I, 445

<sup>4</sup> John Lee, *Memorial* (1824), 39 ; *Additional Memorial* (1826), 36f.

<sup>5</sup> *Works*, IV, 133ff.



Much more might be added regarding the real changes involved in the Reformation as far as the Bible is concerned; but there is good evidence to illustrate how close was Knox's general view of the Bible to that of the 4th and 5th centuries. The Reformation was a re-formation, and the Church of Scotland remained part of the Church Catholic. Knox accepted the Bible narrative as historical precisely as did Ambrose and Augustine; and no more than any of the Fathers did he question the world outlook and the plan of salvation which the Scripture pages declare. He is clearly much closer to the pre-Reformation conception of the Bible than he is to that of the post-Wellhausen age to which we belong. The later 19th century witnessed a more radical change in this respect than did the 16th; and perhaps Church History by-and-by will find there a cleavage of greater significance than that which we tend to regard as the one breach of continuity.

## II

Even with regard to Church authority and tradition Knox's position is not quite so different from that of the pre-Reformation Church as he would have us suppose. Like Calvin he savagely opposed and bitterly disowned the Anabaptists<sup>1</sup> whose subjective eccentricities of interpretation by the inner light appeared to some to be the logical consequence of Reformation individual liberty and the general dissemination of scripture. He is thus driven back to something not unlike the Romanist attitude that "the spirit in the society interprets the spirit in the books." Calvin had, perhaps under the influence of Bucer, an almost Cyprianic doctrine of the Church: "There is no other means of entering into life unless she conceive us in the womb and give us birth, unless she nourish us at her breasts, and in short keep us under her charge and government until, divested of mortal flesh, we become like the angels."<sup>2</sup> The same thing is really implied by Knox when he writes: "We have not so litle profited in the schoole of Christ Jesus that we wold wrest the wordes of the Holie Ghost to a contrarie sense" . . . "We build our doctrine upon evident testimonies of the Scriptures and upon the chief principalles of our religion and faith."<sup>3</sup> This last phrase is important. The *Scots Confession* states: "We dare not receive or admit any interpretation quhilk repugnes to ony principall point of our faith, or to ony uther plaine text of Scripture, or zit unto the rule of charitie."<sup>4</sup> A test is thus applied which amounts to the tradition of the religious community to which the interpreter belongs.

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, V, 422, etc.; *Calvin's Tracts* (edit. Beveridge, 1851), III, 416.

<sup>2</sup> *Inst.*, IV, i, 4. See C. Gore, *Roman Catholic Claims* (1909), 61.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, V, 166.

<sup>4</sup> *Art.* XVIII.

Both for the pre-Reformation Church and for Knox the interpreter is the Holy Spirit, and in both cases the Spirit works through the religious community ; but in the former case emphasis is laid on the community and in the latter on the individual. For centuries the Church had been steadily adding to tradition in legend and superstition and ceremony, until older ways were almost lost under a jungle growth. The Reformers, Knox among them, cut away with zeal and restored earlier and simpler ways, and they believed that they were rid of human traditions ; but they were not. The Church in the Middle Ages had built up an authoritative interpretation and read into Scripture any number of things that Knox could not find there ; but the method was the same. Knox was guided by the tradition of the early Church and that of the experience of his own generation and the experience of his individual life. Even Roman views and customs that might appear to be the work of the Church itself under the direct leading of the Spirit and with the least conceivable reference to the Bible, can be paralleled in Knox, though he would have been shocked to think so. On the other hand much that Knox would discard as mere human invention was, in the minds of those who began or made use of the practice, justified by biblical warrant. In fact community and individual are too interdependent to allow the Church and the Bible to be separated to the extent that either Knox or his opponents imagined to be possible. The difference between them, though great, was a matter of degree.

### III

Let us turn then to Knox's Works and seek to illustrate this element of continuity between his doctrine and use of Scripture and those of the Early Church. We may note Knox's familiarity with the contents of the Bible, an experience and education which he shared with Church leaders in all periods. Of Scripture Jerome had said : " I beg of you, my dear brother, to live among these books, to meditate upon them, to know nothing else, to seek nothing else " ;<sup>1</sup> and we know how intimate were Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, Luther and Calvin with the sacred volume. There are not many books of Old or New Testament from which quotations do not appear in the published writings of Knox, and texts and references came readily to his pen.

Knox's early education was in Latin and he was familiar with the Vulgate, more than once quoting St. Paul in Latin.<sup>2</sup> He hints that something must be plain to such as are " but meanly sene in the Greke or

<sup>1</sup> *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Wace and Schaff), VI, 102.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, III, 42, 50, 57.

Latine tongue.”<sup>1</sup> In 1550 we find him writing : “ In the Hebrew tounge I confes myself ignorant ” ;<sup>2</sup> but he repaired this defect, and we have him writing to others : “ The lacke of the Hebrew tongue may be the cause of your error,”<sup>3</sup> and he also says : “ He who hath faithfully travelled in the tongues and in the writings of godlie men is more able to avoid error and also more apt to teach the trueth and to confute the adversarie.”<sup>4</sup> We may compare Knox’s attitude with that of Augustine in his *Christian Doctrine*<sup>5</sup> and with Jerome’s strictures on want of education in a minister.<sup>6</sup>

Knox of course lays stress upon the plainness and perspicuity of Scripture. In this he followed earlier thought. Origen had written : “ The holy Apostles in preaching the faith of Christ delivered themselves with the utmost clearness.”<sup>7</sup> Irenaeus speaks of the Scriptures as declaring the true faith “ openly and without obscurity and in a manner that can be understood in the same way by all.”<sup>8</sup> Augustine in a number of passages refers to the plainness of scripture language.<sup>9</sup> The most casual reader of Knox must be struck by the number of times he testifies to this quality of scripture. “ Goddis plane Word ” ;<sup>10</sup> “ the plain Scripture convicteth you ” ;<sup>11</sup> such phrases constantly occur ; and in addressing Queen Mary on a famous occasion he put the matter forcibly : “ The Word of God is plane in the self ; and iff thair appear any obscuritie in one place, the Holy Ghost, whiche is never contrariouse to himself, explanes the same more clearlie in other places, so that thair can remane no doubt but unto suche as obstinatlie remane ignorant.”<sup>12</sup>

This last quotation admits the need for comparison and study, “ exercise ”<sup>13</sup> in the Scriptures ; but suggests no possible difficulty in reaching the truth. So Augustine had admitted that there were obscure places, explaining<sup>14</sup> that we must use the evidence of passages about which there is no doubt to remove all hesitation in regard to the doubtful passages, and that it is our business to demonstrate the agreement of texts even when they seem to clash, in which spirit he himself attempted a *Harmony of the Evangelists*. So also Knox says : “ We stick none otherwise to the literall sense of these former wordes of the Apostle then the rest of Scriptures permitt and do teach us.”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, V, 411.    <sup>2</sup> III, 47.    <sup>3</sup> V, 241 ; cp. V, 98, 283.    <sup>4</sup> V, 295.

<sup>5</sup> Dods’s *Trans.*, II, ch. 11.

<sup>6</sup> *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, VI, 97 ; cp. *Calvin’s Tracts*, III, 71.

<sup>7</sup> *Ante-Nicene Library* (Roberts and Donaldson), X, 2.

<sup>8</sup> *Against the Heresies*, II, 27, 2 (*Early Christian Classics*, S.P.C.K., 1916).

<sup>9</sup> *Confessions* (F. J. Sheed’s *Trans.*, 1944), VI, 5 ; *Christian Doctrine*, II, ch. 9.

<sup>10</sup> *Works*, II, 184.    <sup>11</sup> V, 88.    <sup>12</sup> II, 284.    <sup>13</sup> IV, 133ff.

<sup>14</sup> *Anti-Pelagian Writings* (Dods), I, 136, 347 ; cp. *Christian Doctrine*, III, ch. 26.

<sup>15</sup> *Works*, V, 196.



The Bible is thus treated as an unity ; and in practice Knox employs one passage to confirm another, choosing indiscriminately from Old or New Testament, from the Gospels or the Epistles. Whether a verse is from Deuteronomy or Revelation it brings "the lycht of Godis Word."<sup>1</sup> Similarly Augustine had quoted indifferently from Chronicles, Psalms or St. Paul ; and Basil puts together texts from Matthew, John and Psalms. The *Scots Confession* is plain as to this : "When controversie then happines, for the right understanding of ony place . . . we ought not sa meikle to luke what men before us have said or done, as unto that quhilk the holie Ghaist uniformelie speakes within the body of the Scriptures."<sup>2</sup>

On the relation of the Old Testament to the New, Knox adopted the view uniformly held by Fathers and Reformers, that the Old is the foreshadowing of the New, the New the fulfilment of the Old. This we find in Justin Martyr<sup>3</sup> and Irenaeus ;<sup>4</sup> and Augustine speaks of the Old Testament as containing "shadows of things to come,"<sup>5</sup> while Calvin declares it to exhibit "only the image of truth while the reality was absent, the shadow instead of the substance."<sup>6</sup> Knox speaks of what we find in the Old Testament as "onlie figures"<sup>7</sup> of what was later revealed. Augustine had declared that the Old Testament "has no taste unless Christ is understood therein."<sup>8</sup> So the *First Book of Discipline* : "By preching of the Evangell we understand nott onlie the Scripturis of the New Testament bot also of the Auld ; to wit the Law, Propheittis and Histories in quhilk Christ Jesus is no les conteaned in figure then we have him now expressed in veritie."<sup>9</sup>

If after study things are still not clear Knox is satisfied that God must will it so ; he only offers us what he thinks we need. This is the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture familiar to the Fathers. Athanasius insists upon it.<sup>10</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem says that the Spirit has spoken "as much as he pleased or as much as we could receive."<sup>11</sup> Calvin held that in Scripture God revealed whatever he wished us to know.<sup>12</sup> For Knox the sufficiency of Scripture is obvious. In the Bible, says the *Scots Confession*, "all thingis necessary to be beleaved for the salvation of mankinde is sufficiently expressed."<sup>13</sup> And Knox writes : "He hath reveled unto us so much as is profitable" and this is "of such sufficiencie, that if an angell

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, III, 206 ; cp. IV, 100.      <sup>2</sup> *Art.* XVIII.

<sup>3</sup> *First Apology*, ch. 32 ; *Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 40.

<sup>4</sup> *Against the Heresies*, III, 21.      <sup>5</sup> *On St. John* (Dods), I, 397.

<sup>6</sup> *Inst.*, II, x, 4.      <sup>7</sup> *Works*, III, 61.

<sup>8</sup> *On St. John*, I, 130.      <sup>9</sup> *Works*, II, 185.

<sup>10</sup> *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, IV, 4 ; 453.      <sup>11</sup> VII, 115.

<sup>12</sup> *Tracts*, I, 106.      <sup>13</sup> *Art.* XVIII.

from the heaven, with wonders, signes and miracles, wolde declare to us a will repugning to that which is alredie reveled . . . we wold hold him accursed and in no wise to be heard.”<sup>1</sup> “ Within the Word of God is armour and weaponis sufficient.”<sup>2</sup>

## IV

All this presupposed a doctrine of the authority, inspiration and infallibility of Scripture with regard to which there was extremely little question from the earliest days. Clement of Alexandria uses the expression “ divine scriptures,” and Irenaeus, Cyprian, Athanasius, Basil all speak in the same way.<sup>3</sup> Augustine says that “ Faith will totter if the authority of Scripture begin to shake.”<sup>4</sup> Calvin declared : “ The full authority which the Scriptures ought to possess with the faithful is not recognised unless they are believed to have come from heaven as directly as if God had been heard giving utterance to them.”<sup>5</sup> Knox constantly uses phrases like : “ the infallibill word of God ” ; “ these are not the wordes of mortal man but of the eternall God ” ; “ Godis word hath supreme autoritie ” ; “ his plaine will revelled in his worde.”<sup>6</sup>

Verbal inspiration is here the theoretical assumption. Justin, Tertullian and Clement take for granted that the writers of Scripture were mere penmen.<sup>7</sup> Origen says : “ That the sacred books are not the compositions of men, but that they were composed by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, agreeably to the will of the Father of all things through Jesus Christ.”<sup>8</sup> Augustine declares the authors of the canonical books “ completely free from error.”<sup>9</sup> Calvin in theory accepted this doctrine, and often showed himself extremely literal, prosaic and unimaginative in his reading of Scripture. He declares the writers to be “ sure and authentic amanuenses of the Holy Spirit ” and their works “ the oracles of God ” ;<sup>10</sup> but he was sometimes in difficulties, and we find him exercising some slight liberty with the “ body ” of the Word, discussing questions of canonicity

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, V, 312.      <sup>2</sup> IV, 113.

<sup>3</sup> W. Sanday, *Inspiration* (1911), 29 ; Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, II, 28 ; *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, IV, 551 ; *Ibid.*, VIII, 229.

<sup>4</sup> *Christian Doctrine*, I, ch. 37.

<sup>5</sup> *Inst.*, I, vii, 1. See also B. F. Westcott, *The Bible in the Church* (1879 ed., 248).

<sup>6</sup> *Works*, III, 64 ; IV, 267, 373, 450, etc.

<sup>7</sup> Justin, *First Apology*, ch. 36 ; *Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 7 ; Tertullian, *Apology*, ch. 18 ; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, VI, 14.

<sup>8</sup> *Ante-Nicene Library*, X, 295 (*De Prin.*, IV, 9).

<sup>9</sup> *Letters* (Dods), I, 319.

<sup>10</sup> *Inst.*, IV, viii, 9.



and recognising differences between Old and New Testaments and between certain books in respect of the importance of their message.<sup>1</sup> Knox was at least as much of a literalist as Calvin. Thus in his argument with Quintin Kennedy he kept on insisting upon the precise wording of Genesis xiv, 18.<sup>2</sup> Yet, like Calvin, he had his favourite passages so that on his death-bed he had Isaiah 53 and John 17 specially read to him,<sup>3</sup> while in the preface to the Geneva Form of Prayers he spoke of the Book of Psalms as "commended to the Church as containing the effect of the whole Scriptures."<sup>4</sup> We are reminded that Athanasius had a special love of the Psalms,<sup>5</sup> and that Augustine wrote: "The Old Testament has its excellence in the five books of Moses, while the New Testament is most refulgent in the authority of the four Gospels."<sup>6</sup>

It was realised by all the Reformers that the Scriptures needed to be interpreted. This explains the interest in education both clerical and popular, an interest particularly strong among Calvinists, and in none more strong than in Knox. Calvin in his reply to Sadoleto makes a special point of the light that had been shed on Scripture by Protestant study and exposition.<sup>7</sup> Augustine has pronounced scientific reasoning "of very great service in searching into and unravelling all sorts of questions that come up in Scripture."<sup>8</sup> Knox accordingly writes: "Search the Scriptures, but search them with judgement";<sup>9</sup> "weying the same and other scriptures";<sup>10</sup> while, remembering the presumption of mere worldly wisdom, he says: "Let argumentes and reason serve onely instede of handmaidens which shall not command but obey Scripture."<sup>11</sup> Knox does show some freedom of judgment as when he mentions Bible statements such as that "God did it in his anger" or "God streichit out his hand"; and yet, says Knox, "na sic thing can be in the Godheid." The Bible uses this language because of our infirmity.<sup>12</sup>

The possibility of misinterpretation is stressed. Heresy usually involved this, and Athanasius had to refute Arian exegesis and cite passages to prove the mistake,<sup>13</sup> while Augustine discusses texts, refutes Pelagian interpretations, and declares: "That passage . . . does not appear to me capable of the interpretation which he would put upon it."<sup>14</sup> Says

<sup>1</sup> A. Dakin, *Calvinism* (1940), ch. x; A. M. Hunter, *The Teaching of Calvin* (1920), ch. v.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, VI, 201ff.      <sup>3</sup> VI, 639, 643.      <sup>4</sup> IV, 165.

<sup>5</sup> R. W. Bush, *St. Athanasius* (1912), 237.

<sup>6</sup> *Anti-Pelagian Writings*, I, 128.

<sup>7</sup> *Tracts*, I, 39.      <sup>8</sup> *Christian Doctrine*, II, ch. 31.

<sup>9</sup> *Works*, III, 60.      <sup>10</sup> V, 42.      <sup>11</sup> V, 61.      <sup>12</sup> III, 363.

<sup>13</sup> J. F. Bethune-Baker, *Introduction to Early History of Christian Doctrine* (1933 ed.), 161.

<sup>14</sup> *Anti-Pelagian Writings*, I, 246.

Knox: "Let the indifferent reader compare the interpretation with the plane words of the prophete and so let thyself judge how irreverently thow doest abuse the moste comfortable wordes of the Holie Gost to establish thy error."<sup>1</sup>

Misinterpretation may be through malice or ignorance. Knox speaks of "wresting the Scriptures against their native sense";<sup>2</sup> and we may compare Augustine, who writes: "Observe how in his ignorance he struggles to overthrow the most salutary words of the remedial Scriptures," and elsewhere refers to "his poisonous perversion of the truth."<sup>3</sup> Knox did not doubt the accuracy of his own interpretations: "This I doubt not to be the mynd of the Holie Ghost," "Ye utterly disagree from the mind and plaine wordes of the Holie Ghost."<sup>4</sup>

Knox assumes that besides the literal and historical meaning Bible passages have a special "Christian" significance. This is clear of verses where he finds "types" of Christ; but we also find him saying: "So must not that Psalme be interpreted of Christe and his passion that David hath no portion of it."<sup>5</sup> Certain words against Jerusalem he would apply to "everie realme and nation that so offendeth."<sup>6</sup> At the same time there must be no "farther stretching the minde of the prophete then his wordes will beare."<sup>7</sup> Thus we see how bias, tradition, the subjective, appear inevitably with interpretation. The work of course is believed to be done under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Origen had said: "The spiritual meaning which the Law conveys is not known to all, but to those only on whom the grace of the Holy Spirit is bestowed in the word of wisdom and knowledge."<sup>8</sup> Augustine had written: "Whatever holy men be our helpers or even holy angels assist us, no one learns aright the things that pertain to life with God until God makes him ready to learn from himself."<sup>9</sup> We find the same thing in Athanasius<sup>10</sup> and in Jerome.<sup>11</sup> Calvin sums up his view in these words: "Our conviction of the truth of Scripture must be derived from a higher source than human conjectures, judgments or reasons, namely, the secret testimony of the Spirit."<sup>12</sup> The *Scots Confession* declares that interpretation "apperteines to the Sprite of God, be the quhilk also the Scripture was written."<sup>13</sup>

This introduces a completely incalculable element, and opens the way for Church Authority, Inner Light or the Calvinist intermediate position.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, V, 58.      <sup>2</sup> V, 245.      <sup>3</sup> *Anti-Pelagian Writings*, I, 250, 410.

<sup>4</sup> *Works*, V, 160f.      <sup>5</sup> V, 48.      <sup>6</sup> IV, 450.      <sup>7</sup> V, 371.

<sup>8</sup> *Ante-Nicene Library*, X, 5 (*De Prin.*, Pref., 8).

<sup>9</sup> *Christian Doctrine*, IV, ch. 16.

<sup>10</sup> *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, IV, 67 (*De Incarn.*, 57).

<sup>11</sup> VI, 98.

<sup>12</sup> *Inst.*, I, vii, 4.      <sup>13</sup> *Art.* XVIII.

<sup>14</sup> W. P. Paterson, *Rule of Faith* (1932 edit.).

All agree that the letter of Scripture must be distinguished from the Word of God. Says Augustine : " The writing of the dispenser of your Word, since it was meant to be of service to many who later should preach upon it, sets flowing in its brevity of utterance torrents of clear truth from which each may draw such truth as he can, one man this, another that."<sup>1</sup> Knox points out in the preface to his work on Predestination " how diverse unto diverse persons shalbe the effect and operation of his word." Christ is a stone of offence to some, the rock of refuge to others ; so his Word is foolishness to some and the sweet odour of life to others. " God's eternall Worde which in itself is alwayes one, worketh so diversly in the heartes of those to whom it is offered."<sup>2</sup> Here we have the idea of religious value, perhaps foreshadowings of Kierkegaard and Barth ; here the humanist finds evidence of a completely subjective standard ; and here we have the explanation of Augustine's famous utterance that apart from Church authority he would not believe the Gospel. There are the three facts, the letter, the community and the individual ; but opinion differs as to the operation of the Holy Spirit. Calvin saw no problem : " Scripture bears upon the face of it as clear evidence of its truth as white and black do of their colour, sweet and bitter of their taste " ;<sup>3</sup> and Knox shows much the same complacency, for he writes : " Belovit sister, dois not your awn hart justifie Godis word to be trew ? "<sup>4</sup>

The test for everything, with Knox as with Calvin, is the plain Word of Scripture. " Laye the booke of God before your eyes," he says. " I never labourit to perswade any man in matteris of religioun (God I tak to record in my conscience) except by the verie simplicitie and playne infallible trewth of Godis Word."<sup>5</sup> It is not difficult to discover similar statements in early writers. Thus Gregory of Nyssa reports the rhetorical question of Macrina : " Who could deny that truth is to be found only in that upon which the seal of Scriptural testimony is set ? "<sup>6</sup> and there is a well-known passage in Cyril of Jerusalem : " Concerning the holy and divine mysteries of the faith, not even a casual statement must be delivered without the Holy Scriptures."<sup>7</sup>

The Reformers would accept nothing that was contrary to Scripture. Knox almost echoes an utterance of Augustine when he protests : " If any man can schaw the contrarie heirof be the plane Scriptures of God, with all submission and thanksgeving I will prefer his judgement to my

<sup>1</sup> *Confessions*, XII, 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, V, 21.

<sup>3</sup> *Inst.*, I, vii, 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Works*, III, 367. <sup>5</sup> IV, 84 ; III, 166.

<sup>6</sup> *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, V, 442 (*On the Soul and the Resurrection*).

<sup>7</sup> *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, VII, 23 (*Catech. Lect.*, IV, 17).



awn.”<sup>1</sup> There is also the celebrated passage in the introduction to the *Scots Confession*.<sup>2</sup>

But further, what is believed or observed should have positive warrant in the Word. “All religioun not groundit upon the Word of God we feirit not to proclame abominabill and wickit.”<sup>3</sup> Knox gives a general application to the particular scriptural command: “Adding nothing to his worde, neither yet diminishinge anything from it.”<sup>4</sup> This is his guide alike as to theology, worship, discipline, government, and even politics. But he wavers in the use he makes of his test. Calvin had observed that “nothing is safer than to banish all the boldness of human sense and adhere solely to what Scripture delivers”;<sup>5</sup> but he admits that Scripture does not go into all details.<sup>6</sup> Knox is sometimes very strictly scripturalist, like the Tertullian of the Montanist period,<sup>7</sup> and demands nothing less than “the express word of God” and “the express commandement of his awn word”;<sup>8</sup> but he agrees that “where the Spirit of God hath keped silence and hath not in plaine sentences declared unto us the will of God our Father, there may a suspend his judgement without hurt of conscience,”<sup>9</sup> while in connection with the argument used against him that the Apostles at Jerusalem made some decisions without Scripture warrant, he wriggles out by saying everything was based on Christ’s precept “that everie ane love another,” which might admit many changes, and by falling back on the fact that the disciples had the Holy Spirit, which line of thought would open the way for many claims.<sup>10</sup>

On doctrine Knox is continually saying: “Our master Christ Jesus plainely affirmeth”; the Apostle affirms “so that we have God’s election . . . planely proved.”<sup>11</sup> Calvin’s theology was very closely biblical. So it had been with Athanasius, with Basil, and in the less speculative West, with Leo. The *de Fide* of Ambrose and Augustine’s *Christian Doctrine* are analyses of Scripture teaching. The Reformers accepted the three creeds without objection because they found them scriptural; but it may be pointed out that although the theology of the creeds was thus traced back to the Bible, it could not have been deduced therefrom without the christological controversies of the 4th and 5th centuries, so that the Reformers received much that was due to tradition. It is also interesting to note that Knox in one place says: “We build our doctrine

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, IV, 107; cp. *Anti-Pelagian Writings*, II, 241 (*On the Soul and its Origin*, I, 34).

<sup>2</sup> Preface (G. D. Henderson’s edit., p. 41).

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, IV, 223.

<sup>4</sup> IV, 498.

<sup>5</sup> *Inst.*, IV, xviii, 12; cp. *Tracts*, II, 147.

<sup>6</sup> *Inst.*, IV, x, 30.

<sup>7</sup> *De Corona*, 2.

<sup>8</sup> *Works*, IV, 231; III, 35.

<sup>9</sup> VI, 205.

<sup>10</sup> III, 46.

<sup>11</sup> V, 50; 43.

upon evident testimonies of the Scriptures and upon the chief principallis of our religion and faith,"<sup>1</sup> a statement which admits the influence of tradition.

If we turn to Worship, we note that the Early Church was very biblical in its practices, and sermons were largely expository. Knox points out that this feature had been added by Sixtus, that by Felix;<sup>2</sup> but we must notice that such accretions had generally some supposed biblical warrant, the allusions being taken, as Knox would have taken them, from any part of Scripture without the least reference to context. Knox, following Calvin, rejected, on the ground of lack of scriptural warrant, a multitude of rites and ceremonies and observances which early Fathers would have regarded as entirely biblical according to traditional interpretation and application. The method was the same though the result of the process was so different.

The *First Book of Discipline* claims strict accordance with God's Word; but it is interesting to observe how equity, justice, reason and godliness seem also to be recognised as involved, while the office of superintendent is set forth merely as "a thing most expedient for this tyme" and the ceremony of the laying on of hands at Ordination is dispensed with on the ground that "seing the mirakle is ceased, the using of the ceremonie we juge is nott necessarie."<sup>3</sup> Many of the details of this document have naturally no biblical parallel. In Order and Discipline Knox was a true disciple of Calvin and scriptural in the same sense as Chrysostom and Gregory the Great.<sup>4</sup>

Knox took an interest in political philosophy, basing all his theories on Scripture. In this he resembled not only Calvin,<sup>5</sup> whose Geneva he so much admired, but also Ambrose<sup>6</sup> and Augustine.<sup>7</sup> Knox believed the civil order as appointed by God, and rulers set up that "men may live in such societie as before God is acceptable."<sup>8</sup> His attitude to Mary of Scots showed him as theocratic as Elijah.<sup>9</sup> He differed indeed from Calvin and also from Augustine on the point of non-resistance, declaring that God had shown approval of those who opposed themselves to ungodly kings.<sup>10</sup> In this he shared the view of Ambrose and other early writers.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, V, 166.

<sup>2</sup> *Works* III, 48. See F. E. Warren, *Liturgy of the Ante-Nicene Church* (1897).

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, II, 184, 202, 193.

<sup>4</sup> *On the Priesthood*; *Cura Pastoralis*.

<sup>5</sup> J. W. Allen, *Political Thought in the 16th Century* (1941 edit.), 49, 62.

<sup>6</sup> Homes Dudden, *St. Ambrose* (1935).

<sup>7</sup> *City of God*. The work is loaded with Scripture references.

<sup>8</sup> *Works*, IV, 390; VI, 237. <sup>9</sup> II, 283.

<sup>10</sup> *Works*, IV, 496; cp. IV, 507; II, 282. See also Allen, *op. cit.*, 52ff; 106ff.

<sup>11</sup> Dudden, *op. cit.*; Pickman, *The Mind of Latin Christendom* (1937), 129 note.

His *Monstrous Regiment of Women*<sup>1</sup> was likewise based on Scripture. He accepts the ruling of Bullinger : “ The law of God ordains the woman to be in subjection and not to rule ; which is clear from the writings of both the Old and the New Testament.”<sup>2</sup> Knox supports his argument by many references to the Fathers. Here we have as in so many places plain betrayal of the traditional and subjective standard which Knox was all the time unconsciously applying as he endeavoured to learn the Word of God from the Bible.

These representative illustrations should afford some indication of Knox’s doctrine of Scripture, the amount of the past that survived in his attitude, and the extent to which in practice both the subjective method of the Anabaptist and the tradition and authority of the Church forced themselves upon him.

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, IV, 373ff.

<sup>2</sup> III, 222.